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SUBJECT: SOUTH DARFUR HUMAN RIGHTS UPDATE

REF: A) KHARTOUM 425 B) KHARTOUM 194 C) 08 KHARTOUM 1302

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Human rights violations as a whole have declined in South Darfur due to a reduction in tribal violence, human rights officers at the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) told poloff on October 7. They expressed alarm, however, at the increase in politically-motivated arrests and detentions, most notably of Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) members believed to be related to upcoming national elections in 2010. They also reported increasing harassment of internally displaced persons (IDPs) at Government of Sudan (GOS) military checkpoints. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On October 7, poloff met with Marcel Akpovo, head of the Human Rights Office at UNAMID Sector South in Nyala, South Darfur. Akpovo reported that clashes among South Darfur's heavily-armed nomadic tribes had subsided since the beginning of the year. "When things are calm, the likelihood of grave human rights abuses decreases," he said. "That's the situation we're in right now." Akpovo credited the reduction in tribal clashes to government-brokered reconciliation agreements and land demarcation, but whether such efforts were sustainable remains to be seen, he said.

¶3. (SBU) Akpovo also credited an improving human rights situation in Muhajeriya to the Government of Sudan (GOS)'s re-taking control of the town following the departure of Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minnawi (SLA/MM) former rebels from the area (ref B). The center of clashes between SLA/MM and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in January 2009, Muhajeriya is "getting better by the day," said Akpovo, noting that the local administration is working hard to establish a rule of law and law enforcement mechanisms.

UPTICK IN OPPOSITION ARRESTS NOTED

¶4. (SBU) While the situation in South Darfur remains calm overall, Akpovo expressed concern about the uptick in politically-motivated arrests and detentions. Such arrests were common following the March 4, 2009 issuance of the International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant against President Omar Al Bashir, but until recently had largely ceased, he said. Now, UNAMID Human Rights has documented a number of individual cases of opposition party members, most notably those belonging to the SPLM, being arrested and detained for political activities in advance of the 2010 elections. "We fear such arrests will become more widespread when the campaign starts in earnest," said Akpovo.

REPORTS OF IDP HARASSMENT RISING

¶5. (SBU) Akpovo also noted increased reports of harassment of IDPs

at GOS road checkpoints, particularly those leading to Kalma IDP camp. Numerous IDPs have reported being harassed and having foodstuffs and other personal property confiscated by GOS soldiers at the entrance to Kalma, he said, though there have been no reports of detentions at the checkpoints. IDP leaders continue to claim an increase in rapes of female IDPs, but there is no evidence to back this up, said Akpovo. "Rapes are still occurring, but there is a lot of misinformation" being propagated by highly-politicized IDP leaders, he said.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: The easing of tribal tensions in South Darfur can just as easily be attributed to a lack of GOS instigation as it can to positive intervention; the GOS is notorious for exploiting ethnic tensions and competition for scarce natural resources to its own advantage through "divide and rule tactics." GOS administration of Muhajeriyyah, nonetheless, seems to be an improvement from the thuggery of SLA/MM. The rise in politically-motivated arrests, meanwhile, is worrying. It could be an indication that in advance of the April 2010 elections, the National Congress Party (NCP) has already begun to harass the opposition.

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